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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000991

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SUBJECT: PUP MOBILIZES FOR POSSIBLE MARCH ELECTIONS -
MAINTAINS MODERATE POLITICAL STANCE

REF: CONAKRY 00960

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. SUMMARY. Guinea's ruling political party, the Party for Unity and Progress (PUP) says its August 17 rally (reftel) was largely misunderstood as it was intended only to demonstrate support for the President and revive the party's image. While the general party message is one of moderation, certain PUP personalities continue to play a destabilizing role within the political arena. On the elections front, unconfirmed reports indicate that the Government may finally be moving toward a fixed election date of March 29. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On August 29, poloff met with Aliou Banire Diallo, member of the Executive Board of the Party for Unity and Progress (PUP) and President of the PUP Parliamentary Group within the National Assembly.

PUP) WE 'VE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD

¶3. (SBU) Speaking of the large rally the PUP held on August 17 (reftel), Diallo said the event was widely misinterpreted by the press, civil society and opposition political parties. The PUP's purpose was simply to demonstrate support for President Lansana Conte and to show that the PUP is alive and well as the country gears up for legislative elections. The party considers the rally a big success, but Diallo said some players, notably unions and civil society organizations, interpreted it as a demonstration against change. Diallo said that this is simply not true. &The PUP has always been a party of peace and tolerance,⁸ he said. Furthermore, the party absolutely supports change. &The Government must improve the overall quality of life) no one is opposed to that idea,⁸ Diallo added.

¶4. (C) However, Diallo said that certain party leaders may have gone too far and been &overly emotional⁸ in their discourse. Specifically, MBemba Bangoura, a controversial figure who is widely considered an extremist within the party, may have made some comments that helped fuel the press and others in thinking the event was more inflammatory than it was intended to be. (Note: Bangoura is currently a member of the Executive Board of the PUP as well as the President of the NGO, the Guinean Association of Solidarity, that co-sponsored the PUP rally. He previously served terms as Governor of Conakry and Governor of Faranah.)

¶5. (SBU) Diallo said that the PUP does not intend to counter negative press through internet news sites or even printed press. According to Diallo, the internet is primarily a mechanism by which to communicate to the Guinean diaspora and a small group of young intellectuals in Guinea who support the opposition. Since more than 80% of Guinea's population does not have access to internet and most are illiterate, Diallo said the PUP will rely on more traditional means of

communication such as radio and public appearances.

PRESIDENT'S PARTY MOBILIZES REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

¶6. (SBU) Diallo also mentioned that several members of the PUP's executive board, including Mamadou Sylla and Sekou Konate (party Secretary General), are currently traveling up country to hold meetings with party representatives throughout the country. Diallo characterized the trip as mainly a mission to share information, but also to sympathize with party members who were victimized during the unrest earlier this year. Diallo stressed that the party is not meeting with voters at this point, but rather, mobilizing representatives as they prepare for upcoming elections. Meetings are planned in each of the seven administrative regions) Faranah, N,Zerekore, Kankan, Mamou, Labe, Kindia and Boke.

WE ARE ALL FOR CHANGE

¶7. (C) In a candid discussion of politics in general, Diallo said there is clearly a problem of leadership at the national level that is wearing everyone down, majority and opposition parties alike. He emphasized that change is necessary, but that there is real disagreement among players as to what change entails. Diallo said that for the PUP, change must happen within the context of continuity, which means maintaining respect for the Constitution and strict adherence to the core values of the republic: sovereignty, integrity, and freedom. Diallo added that violence should not be

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necessary to effect change. &We should not have to wait until people take to the streets; we don't need strikes with over 100 people dead to push us to act.⁸

RUMORS OF NEW ELECTION DATE

¶8. (SBU) Turning to the elections, Diallo said he has not been able to confirm yet, but he understands that the Ministry of Interior sent letters to all parties suggesting a timeline for elections preparations leading up to an actual election date of March 29. He added that the Minister of Interior is scheduled to meet with parties on August 31, which should clarify where things stand.

WHAT IS TRANSPARENCY?

¶9. (C) Diallo also commented on the issue of transparency with respect to the elections. Every participant has a different definition of transparency, which could ultimately lead to conflict when the elections finally take place, he said. &If one is within the losing party, that person will automatically claim that the elections were not transparent.⁸ He added that observers should be aware of this problem and work to help minimize its potential impact. Diallo then joked &if the PUP sat down with all the parties tomorrow and said that it had decided to abstain from the elections, everyone would stop talking about the need for transparency.⁸

COMMENT

¶10. (C) While Diallo's message seems to be that the PUP is a party of moderation ultimately looking to improve the overall political situation just like everyone else, the party does

have some extreme elements (led by MBemba Bangoura and Mamadou Sylla) that are potentially destabilizing and may be spurring the backlash of response from various sectors of society. Other poloff contacts within the PUP have, like Diallo, also said that they truly want a peaceful transition.

However, Mamadou Sylla is a powerful influence with deep pockets and it is unclear how far his network extends or how far he and his cronies are willing to go to assure that they remain within the power nexus.

¶11. (SBU) The report that the Ministry of the Interior and political parties may finally be moving towards a realistic election date with a set timeline for the necessary preparatory activities is encouraging. The population is eager to see progress on this front and an official announcement by the Government would do much to help dampen the general undercurrents of civil unrest. The fact that PUP party leadership is making its first trip upcountry since the events in January and February indicates that the party is mobilizing its membership for the elections, another positive sign that things are moving forward.

BROKENSHERE